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AUTHOR Berg, David; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Transitional planning is incorporated into the multidisciplinary Individualized Education Program process for mildly handicapped tenth graders. A specific transition/termination plan was developed based on a vocational evaluation. Updating the transition plan is addressed in the student's final year, with referrals initiated to appropriate community services when necessary. A guide was developed to help the student and parent obtain help from community agencies. The guide was based on information from 94 agency responses to a questionnaire on service availability. The handbook listed the agency and its services, eligibility and fee requirements, along with names of contact persons. (CL)

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SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONING OF SECONDARY SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

- FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO THE COMMUNITY -

PARTICIPANTS

United Township High School District #30, 13th Street & 42nd Avenue, East Moline, Il. 61244, David Berg, Special Education Department Head (309) 752-1679

Black Hawk Area Special Education District, 814 30th Avenue, East Moline, Il. 61244, Dr. William Hitchings, Consultant

Moline High School District #40, 3600 23rd Avenue, Moline, Il. 61265, Mary Anne Prichard, Special Education Department Head

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention

of the

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ABSTRACT

A transitional model incorporated into the existing multidisciplinary conference, individual education planning process is utilized by the United Township High School of East Moline, Illinois. The model is based on the results of a study of special education graduates and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Rules and Regulations for Special Education (1979).

As a result, such planning has allowed for a continuity of service after graduation; reduced parent and student anxiety; and increased agency effectiveness. An examination of MDC/IEP documents has shown an increase in parent participation; referrals based upon specific adjustment problems of individuals; and an increase in vocational services.

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Rationale

To help handicapped adolescents move from the school to the community, transitional planning was incorporated into the existing individual education planning process utilized by United Township High School (UTHS) of East Moline, Illinois. The model was based on the results of a study of UTHS special education graduates and the requirements for termination described in the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Rules and Regulations for Special Education (1979).

The Process

To meet state requirements for transition as well as assist students who had continuing needs, it was decided to incorporate transitional planning into the district's existing MDC/IEP process.

In the tenth grade, an MDC is convened to review new information from a student's updated case study. A vocational evaluation is completed, as part of the case study re-evaluation, to help determine vocational options. Based on the needs of the student and the district's requirements, a specific transition/termination plan is prepared. Specific goals and objectives are added to form the student's IEP which is reviewed each year.

Prior to the Fall annual review in the student's

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final or senior year, participants in the review are asked if the student's needs are expected to continue beyond that year and if such needs will impact on the student's adjustment in the community. Local agencies which may have programs to meet the student's needs are then invited to participate in the Fall IEP review in order to present their services and referral procedures.

A termination MDC/IEP is held prior to graduation. The students needs are reviewed, and, when necessary, a referral is initiated to the appropriate community service.

During the development of the transitional model, it was found that handicapped individuals and their families had many problems, but few sought help from local agencies. A guide to community services for the handicapped was prepared in order to help both the student and the family obtain assistance for their needs.

Results

The guide was the product of a study examining the information needs of special education students and their parents. The research was conducted by surveying three groups - parents of educable mentally handicapped students, community social service agencies, and directors of guidance and special education.

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Forty (40) parents, representing the graduating classes of 1981 through 1986 were surveyed to determine their information needs (See Figure 1). They were also asked to detail their involvement with community social service agencies.

A parent survey was developed utilizing forced choice questions based upon the problems identified in the literature. These problems included high unemployment and underemployment, inappropriate social skills, financial difficulties, negative contacts with law enforcement agencies, and insufficient educational and vocational training opportunities.

Most (78%) of the parents responding felt a need to know more about available community services. They ranked information about vocational training as their most important concern. Less than half of the respondents (45%) indicated they had had previous contact with any social service agency. However, a majority (85%) of the parents anticipated a need for information regarding counseling, education, legal aid, financial assistance, recreation, or vocational training during the next five years.

One hundred eight (108) community service agencies were sent a questionaire to determine the availability of services to the handicapped and their service network (See

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Figure 2). The agencies contacted offered one or more of the following services: counseling, education, financial assistance, legal aid, recreation or vocational training programs.

Ninety four (94) agencies identified their geographic service areas; primary services; fees (if any); eligibility requirements; and referral procedures.

Twenty four agencies (26%) made up the network serving the mildly mentally handicapped. Nineteen of these agencies (79%) provided counseling services. Ten agencies (42%) provided various types of vocational training. Seven agencies (29%) serviced the education needs of the mildly mentally handicapped. Five of the agencies (21%) made legal assistance available. Only two agencies (8%) identified themselves as providers of financial assistance.

The third group included twenty-one directors of guidance and special education. They represented districts in two Illinois special education cooperatives - the Black Hawk Area Special Education District, and the Henry Stark Special Education District. In addition, three Iowa school districts in the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency were also contacted.

The directors were asked to provide information

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regarding their own programs as well as available community services (See Figure 3). They were asked for the types of information routinely provided and the format used to convey the information.

A review of the administrative responses showed that all twenty-one district (100%) provided information about their own programs. Eighteen districts (86%) provided vocational training information. Thirteen districts (62%) included information about counseling services in the community. Five districts (24%) presented financial assistance information. Three districts (14%) identified sources of leisure time activities for the mentally handicapped. Three district (14%) also provide information to obtain legal aid.

Districts most often disseminated information during the annual review of the IEP. Other sources for information were private counseling sessions and/or student handbooks.

Conclusion

As a result of identifying the information needs of parents and students, the district personnel were more aware of the problems parents faced trying to locate support services. Although parents had realized a need for services, they did not know where or how to obtain

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information about the agencies in order to make use of their services. Unfortunately, when parents turned to the schools for information, no guide to present information was available.

In order to assist parents, the UTHS staff prepared a community services handbook based on the results of the agency survey. The handbook was limited to those agencies providing services to the mentally handicapped and their families.

The handbook listed the agency and its services, and eligibility and fee requirements. A current directory of contact persons, addresses and telephone numbers were also included in the handbook.

It was decided to give the handbook to parents and to students during the Fall IEP of the final year unless information was needed prior to the senior year.

This project allowed for a continuity of services after graduation. An examination of MDC/IEP documents has shown an increase in parent participation during the transition process. Therefore, referrals are based upon specific individual adjustment problems.

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